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House of Representatives

Statement of Representative Tom Udall of New Mexico

H.J.Res. 114 – To authorize the use of United States Armed Forces against Iraq October 9, 2002

Mr. Speaker. The house is engaged in a great and serious debate on an issue of incredible importance.

And given the strong arguments on both sides, we may have missed the fact that we actually agree on many points.

We all agree with the president that Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator.

We all agree with the president that both Iraq and the world would be better off without him.

We all agree with the president that Iraq must be rid of its weapons of mass destruction.

So – as the President said on Monday night – we all agree on the goal. The issue is how best to achieve it.

Right now we have two choices.

We can vote for the resolution before us, or we can vote against it.

If we vote for it, we are – in effect – granting the president unprecedented authority to launch a unilateral pre-emptive strike against Iraq.

Much has been made of the fact that the resolution is not the blank check originally submitted by the president.

That concessions have been made. That under the current resolution, the president is required to exhaust all diplomatic measures before launching an attack on Iraq. That the president is required to give Congress prior notice of such an attack.

Rhetoric and semantics aside, this is still a blank check.

The president alone makes the final determination of exhaustion of diplomatic remedies. This resolution simply adds a step to the process. It will not have an impact on the final decision. It will not give Congress a greater role in the decision making. Notice to Congress is a mere formality.

Sadly, proper deference has not been given to the authority vested in Congress by the Constitution to exercise the power to declare war.

The founders must have believed, as I do now, that the power to wage war is too awesome a power to vest in the executive.

War is too dangerous and too important a matter to be left to the discretion of one man.

This war would be especially dangerous. We would be acting alone. Not only without allies, but also with the hostile condemnation of the rest of the Arab world.

We would undermine the war against terrorism. And, indeed, increase the risk of future terrorist attacks against our own country.

We would undermine the authority and mission of the United Nations – our best hope for a peaceful solution.

It is dangerous to go forward without knowing how long this war will take, how many lives will be lost --- military and civilian --- how much it will cost, how much of a drain it will be on our already dangerously weak economy, how long it will take to rebuild a devastated Iraq, and whether Iraq will ever be a viable democracy.

So, before we vote, we must ask: Why now? Why the rush?

There is too much danger lurking in the unknown and untried.

With the election only weeks away, there is too much of the taint of political expediency to gain the trust of our international friends.

I cannot support this resolution.

I will support the United Nations leading an international coalition to disarm Iraq.

At the very least, we should give the UN a chance before we embark on the dangerous path this resolution takes us.

I will vote against H.J.RES 114.